

Message Text

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ACTION IO-14

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CG-00 DOTE-00 CIAE-00
COME-00 DODE-00 EB-08 FMC-01 INR-07 NSAE-00
DLOS-09 OES-07 CEQ-01 EPA-01 AF-10 ARA-10 EA-10
NEA-10 OIC-02 /103 W
-----088757 301521Z /43

P R 301423Z JAN 78
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4961
INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

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E. O. 11652:N/A
TAGS: PORG, IMCO, FR
SUBJECT: INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON TANKER SAFETY
AND POLLUTION PREVENTION, PREPARATIONS FOR THE
CONFERENCE.

REF: (A) STATE 020529 (B) STATE 296444

SUMMARY: FRENCH HAVE DEVELOPED "COMPROMISE" PROPOSAL
WHEREBY SEGREGATED BALLAST APPROACH WOULD APPLY ONLY
TO SMALLER TANKERS. CLAIM THIS PROPOSAL WOULD
ADEQUATELY MEET US DOMEST NEEDS. SEE IMCO CONFERENCE
AS REJECTING SBT APPROACH IF APPLIED TO ALL TANKERS.
CONCERNED ABOUT MECHANISMS FOR ORGANIZATION OF FORTH-
COMING IMCO CONFERENCE. END SUMMARY.

1. FRENCH POSITION RE SEGREGATED BALLAST TANKS
(SBT) IN EXISTING TANKERS HAS INDEED BEEN MODIFIED,
ACCORDING TO XAVIER DUCLAUX (MARINE MARCHAND) -- BUT
THE BASIC CONSIDERATION IS POLITICAL NOT TECHNICAL.
DUCLAUX TOLD EMBASSY TRANSPORTATION AND COMMUNI-
CATIONS OFFICER JANUARY 26 GOF ASSESSMENT IS THAT
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US WILL NOT SECURE SUBSTANTIAL MAJORITY AT FEBRUARY
IMCO CONFERENCE FOR A SEGREGATED BALLAST PROTOCOL,
EVEN THOUGH GOF WOULD LIKE TO SUPPORT THIS WITHOUT
QUALIFICATION FOR ENVIRONMENTAL REASONS. AT THE SAME
TIME GOF IS NOT CONVINCED OF TECHNICAL MERITS OF
ALTERNATIVE CRUDE OIL WASHING (COW) SYSTEM TO
ACHIEVE ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTIVES, EVEN THOUGH THE

LARGEST NUMBER OF COUNTRIES APPEAR TO FAVOR THIS APPROACH AS THE LESSER OF TWO EVILS FROM COST VIEW-POINT.

2. IN FRENCH VIEW A COMPROMISE MUST BE STRUCK BETWEEN SBT AND COW APPROACHES IF CONFERENCE IS TO ACHIEVE A POSITIVE RESULT BY A SIZEABLE MAJORITY. FRENCH APPROACH IS BASED ON CONCEPT THAT US BASIC NEED IS TO DEAL WITH EXISTING TANKERS WHICH CAN USE US PORTS THAT IS, THOSE IN 20,000 TO 100,000 TON SIZE RANGE. THEREFORE SBT REQUIREMENT SHOULD APPLY ONLY TO THIS SIZE VESSEL. TANKERS OVER 100,000 TONS CAN NOT CALL AT US PORTS, NOW OR IN FORESEEABLE FUTURE, AND THEREFORE COW APPROACH CAN BE APPLIED TO THEM.

3. FURTHERMORE, IN FRENCH VIEW, 20,000 TO 100,000 TON TANKERS ARE GENERALLY OLDER VESSELS (FREQUENTLY UNDER FLAGS OF CONVENIENCE) WHICH ARE OPERATED BY RELATIVELY POORLY QUALIFIED CREWS AND IT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO FOCUS ON THESE VESSELS WHICH ARE THE MORE DANGEROUS IN TERMS OF OIL POLLUTION. LARGER TANKERS (EVEN WHEN OPERATED UNDER FLAGS OF CONVENIENCE) HAVE HIGHER QUALITY CREWS -- ACCORDING TO STUDIES DONE IN IMCO AND OECD -- AND THEREFORE ARE RELATIVELY SAFE. COST-BENEFIT CONSIDERATIONS ARE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ALSO A FACTOR HERE. RETROFITTING OF LARGE TANKERS WITH SBTS WOULD COST ABOUT 4 BILLION DOLLARS GLOBALLY WHILE RETROFITTING SMALLER VESSELS (ALLOWING FOR DECISIONS TO SCRAP MANY OF THEM) WOULD COST ONLY ABOUT A HALF A BILLION DOLLARS. SINCE LARGER VESSELS DO NOT COME TO US PORTS AND REPRESENT A SIZEABLE COST FACTOR IN RELATION TO RELATIVELY NEGLIGIBLE BENEFITS, FRENCH THINK THEIR PROPOSAL MAY BE ATTRACTIVE. ITS COST BURDEN ON LDC'S WOULD BE RELATIVELY LIGHT. HOWEVER, DUCLAUX FEARS FRENCH PROPOSAL IS NOT LIKELY TO GET GOOD SUPPORT FROM LDC'S -- WHO OPERATE MANY SMALLER VESSELS -- AND THUS ITS PASSAGE BY IMCO CONFERENCE IS NOT ASSURED, UNLESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES --

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ESPECIALLY US -- SUPPORT IT IN GOOD NUMBERS, IF SO
ENOUGH LDC'S MAY GO ALONG.

4. FRENCH HAVE FLOATED THEIR APPROACH TO
USSR WHICH HAS GIVEN SOMEWHAT ENCOURAGING TECHNICAL
AND ECONOMIC SUPPORT, BUT USSR IS DOUBTFUL IF
LDC'S WILL BUY IT. GOF ALSO RAISED ISSUE IN JANUARY
23-24 MEETING OF OECD SPECIAL AD HOC WORKING GROUP
ON OIL CARRIER SITUATION, BUT GOT NO REACTION FROM
US DELEGATION ACCORDING TO DUCLAUX. IN THAT BODY
SOME SUPPORT APPEARED FORTHCOMING FROM SWEDEN,
NETHERLANDS AND DENMARK, HE SAID, BUT UK, GERMANY
AND NORWAY REACTED NEGATIVELY.

5. DUCLAUX IS PRESENTLY MOST CONCERNED ABOUT TACTICAL
SITUATION AT FORTHCOMING IMCO CONFERENCE AND HOW BEST
FRENCH SHOULD PROCEED AS TO GET ITS APPROACH ACCEPTED
AS COMPROMISE. HE SEES UK AS STRONGLY COMMITTED TO
COW TECHNIQUE AND UNWILLING TO ACCEPT ANY COMPROMISE.
IN HIS VIEW INDIA IS IN UK'S POCKET AND LDC MAJORITY
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IS LIKELY FOLLOW INDIA'S LEAD. DUCLAUX SAID UK
FAVORS ORGANIZATION OF CONFERENCE IN SUCH A WAY
AS TO DISCUSS SBT APPROACH FIRST, EXPECTING IT TO
BE REJECTED, LEAVING WAY OPEN FOR COW APPROACH. IN
FRENCH VIEW CONFERENCE SHOULD BE ORGANIZED NOT ON

BASIS OF TECHNICAL APPROACHES, BUT ON BASIS OF
TANKER SIZE. IF PROBLEMS OF SMALLER VESSELS AND
OF LARGER VESSELS CAN BE SEPARATELY DISCUSSED THERE
IS A GOOD LIKELIHOOD THAT FRENCH APPROACH CAN BE
PUT FORWARD EFFECTIVELY. HOWEVER, IF US SUPPORTS
BRITISH IN HAVING CONFERENCE DISCUSS FIRST SBT AND
LATER COW THERE IS GOOD LIKELIHOOD SBT WILL BE
REJECTED AND THE MAIN ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEM (THAT
OF THE SMALLER TANKERS) CAST ASIDE.

6. DUCLAUX WILL ARRIVE LONDON ABOUT NOON ON SUNDAY
FEBRUARY 5 AND IS WILLING MEET BENKERT THAT
EVENING FOR FULL DISCUSSION OF SITUATION. ARRANGE-
MENTS SHOULD BE MADE THROUGH FRENCH MARITIME ATTACHE
LONDON WHO HAS BEEN BRIEFED ON FRENCH COMPROMISE
APPROACH.

COMMENT: WE ARE INFORMED US DELEGATION DID EXPRESS
RESERVATIONS RE FRENCH COMPROMISE PROPOSED AT
JANUARY 23-24 OECD MEETING USING INSTRUCTIONS
CONTAINED STATE 16531. (SEE SEPTTEL FROM US OECD).
HOWEVER, DUCLAUX APPARENTLY INTERPRETED THESE
RESERVATIONS AS CONSTITUTING NO SUBSTANTIVE
REACTION. RE REF. (B) GOF DEFINITELY PLANS PARTICI-
PATE FEBRUARY IMCO CONFERENCE, REGARDS ITSELF IN
GENERAL AS ALLIGNED WITH US, AND DOES NOT APPEAR TO
NEED ANY FURTHER INFO FROM USG.

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